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The situation in the Middle East

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Seventy-second year

Identical letters dated 3 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I transmit to you herewith a letter from the Lebanese National Ministry of Defence responding to the allegations contained in the Israeli letter of 13 March 2017 (S/2017/216) (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex issued as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 34, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Nawaf **Salam**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the identical letters dated 3 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Comments of the Armed Forces Command regarding the letter from the Israeli enemy addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council regarding the so-called violations by Lebanon of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)

Violations of the Blue Line, including at TP16, and in the Shab'a Farms

These violations in fact consist of Lebanese farmers and shepherds ploughing their land north of the technical fence, which remains under Israeli occupation. That has been the situation since 2000. The proposed solution is to address the issue of the areas with regard to which Lebanon maintains a claim, restore Lebanese sovereignty over those areas and operationalize the Observer Group Lebanon's monitoring of the armistice line, thereby implementing paragraphs 5 and 10 of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

The allegation regarding Hizbullah activity

These allegations are mendacious and baseless. All photographs presented at the trilateral meetings were of Lebanese civilians or Lebanese Army intelligence officials.

Incidents between civilians and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)

These incidents were not intended to hinder UNIFIL movement. Instead, they were caused by a misunderstanding between civilians and UNIFIL patrols, owing to those patrols' failure to grasp the importance of respecting private property and the customs of village inhabitants. The Lebanese Army is working to address these incidents in coordination with UNIFIL. It is normal that incidents of this nature should occur from time to time with the Lebanese Army, given that any military force operating among civilians may encounter incidents arising from a misunderstanding with them. The Israeli enemy's interference in these incidents therefore amounts to blatant meddling in an internal Lebanese matter.

Armed individuals

Those individuals are Lebanese citizens who hunt as a pastime and have in no way undermined security or stability. Nevertheless, the Lebanese Army arrested them because they were acting in violation of Lebanese laws that prohibit hunting in the area south of the Litani, and the Armed Forces Command recently circulated a directive as a reminder the decision to prohibit hunting in the area south of the Litani River, particularly near the Blue Line.

It should be noted that:

(a) After a thorough review of these allegations, it has emerged that, according to the UNIFIL coordination mechanism, the Lebanese Army was not notified of 70 per cent of them when they occurred. This failure casts doubt on whether the incidents actually occurred;

(b) In the trilateral meetings, the Lebanese party explained its position on the violations of which it stands accused by the Israeli party. Both parties had

previously been exchanging lists of violations and responses to the lists. However, the Israeli party has stopped submitting lists and begun to send them directly to the United Nations with the intent to deceive and divert attention from its own daily land, sea and air violations;

(c) On several occasions, the Lebanese party has presented its position on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) to United Nations officials, elucidated the issues that hinder the implementation of that resolution and made recommendations on how to address the problem. The most recent occasion was before the United Nations strategic review team at the meeting held on 18 January 2017 during its visit to Lebanon. The issues are:

- The Israeli enemy's continued occupation of the Shab'a Farms and the Lebanese part of the town of Ghajar;
- The areas with regard to which Lebanon maintains a claim, Lebanese territory that remains between the Blue Line and the international borders;
- Israeli air, sea and land violations;
- The Israeli enemy's acts of espionage, whether by means of the towers it has constructed along the Blue Line, or by means of its collaborators inside Lebanon and the Israeli espionage devices that were discovered within Lebanese territory.

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Identical letters dated 5 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Upon instructions from my Government, I am writing to you with regard to the brutal, inhuman chemical weapon attacks perpetrated in Syria on 4 April 2017 in Khan Sheikhoun, Idlib, which claimed the lives of over 100 innocent civilians, including children.

The imagery and information received from Khan Sheikhoun indicate the continual use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, in a flagrant breach of Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013) and 2209 (2015). Despite this fact, we are appalled to see that the regime shamelessly dared to send, on the very same day of its attacks, yet another letter containing spurious allegations, which we categorically refute.

The use of toxic chemicals as weapons constitutes a war crime, a crime against humanity and a very serious violation of international law. It is a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Syria is a party, and defies the relevant Security Council resolutions. It also represents a grave violation of the ceasefire regime.

As we witnessed very clearly once again, the use of chemical weapons has been one of the horrendous aspects of the six-year-old conflict in Syria. I would like to recall that the deadliest such chemical weapon attack occurred on 21 August 2013, when over 1,300 innocent civilians were killed by the regime in eastern Ghouta, Damascus.

Yesterday's attacks are comparable in their brutality to those in eastern Ghouta four years ago. The agent used in both attacks, sarin, is, unlike chlorine, a highly toxic nerve agent 20 times as deadly as cyanide. It is the most evil of evils.

Let us remember that the international community condemned those attacks in Ghouta in which sarin was used, and that the Security Council, under resolution 2118 (2013), decided that the regime should not use, develop or produce chemical weapons, and endorsed the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Executive Council decision on the destruction of the regime's chemical weapons programme. Furthermore, the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism was also established, under resolution 2235 (2015), as the collective response of the international community to the regime's chemical weapons attacks, which continued through August 2015 on opposition-held areas in Syria.

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Under both resolutions, the Security Council also decided that it would impose measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations in case of violations, one of which is the continued use of chemicals as weapons, an undertaking that was repeated in the consecutive resolutions on the matter.

Two years, five Joint Investigative Mechanism reports and numerous OPCW decisions later, we find ourselves repeating the original discussion on the matter, with the main difference being those killed and wounded, including women and children, and the massive damage done to humanity.

The Syrian regime has thereby acquired a well-established notorious record of committing atrocities involving the use of toxic chemicals as weapons. The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism reports include detailed descriptions of the dastardly fashion in which the regime has used chemical weapons.

The systematic and repeated use of toxic chemicals, the most recent examples of which were demonstrated on 25 and 30 March and 4 April 2017, is a reminder to the international community, first and foremost to the members of the Security Council, that unless the perpetrators of these attacks are held accountable for their crimes, they will continue unabated.

The use of chemical weapons cannot be allowed to continue with impunity, and the regime, which has the blood of the Syrian people on its hands, must be held accountable. Its crimes should not go unpunished.

We call on all the relevant parties, first and foremost the Security Council and those who have influence on the Syrian regime, to fulfil their moral, humanitarian and legal responsibilities in order to ensure an immediate end to such brutal attacks. The attacks constitute grave violations of the ceasefire regime, which is under stress.

From the very beginning, Turkey has been committed to finding a solution to the conflict in Syria that would meet the legitimate demands and aspirations of the Syrian people, which were raised in a peaceful manner six years ago. A genuine political transition and a political transformation that will preserve the political unity and territorial integrity of the country and lead to a democratic constitution and free and fair elections, whereby the people of Syria can express themselves freely within a non-sectarian, pluralist system, must be realized without further delay.

Under the guidance of the United Nations, and in close cooperation with the relevant countries, the international community should demonstrate its determination to this end.

I would be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Feridun H. **Sinirlioğlu**
Permanent Representative